

## MENTORING THE **engineers** **of tomorrow**

*Story and photos  
by Justin Ward*



In school, most of us learn a lot of theory. Class after class and book after book, the academic theories we learn pile up. Usually, it's only when we start our first job out of school that we actually put that theory to practice and can discern the abstract from the concrete.

However, for highschoolers at General H.H. Arnold High School in Wiesbaden, Germany, putting theory into practice can be done before they even graduate.

Through the school's career practicum program, students take several hours each week to understand the actual employment settings for a job that they are interested in learning more about.

It is designed to provide school-to-career experiences and training to students interested in finding out more about actual employment settings, allowing them to acquire learning and self-management tools as well as apply learned problem solving skills in the work environment.

For Victor Klunk, a senior who is enrolled in the

program, that job is (potentially) mechanical engineering.

"I myself have never really had a job before," said Klunk, who spends about three hours each week with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Europe District. "And this program gives you a look on the inside of what it's going to be like when you're not in high school and you don't really have your parents around to help you with everything."

At the District, Klunk has been learning about both mechanical engineering and computer-aided design from John Wutzer, a mechanical engineer who has volunteered to be Klunk's mentor for the year.

Wutzer said he's glad to see students like Klunk get the chance to test out the field early on because the work experience teaches both the technical and social aspects of the workplace.

"He's taken on everything that we've given him so far," Wutzer said of Klunk. "Anything that's needed to get done, he's been right there for us."

Wutzer said he volunteered to mentor a student

in the program before and thought the experience was beneficial to both the student and the District.

"We were very busy at the time trying to get a lot of projects out," he said. "So, when somebody came along who was willing to learn and help us out, it certainly helped us meet a lot of deadlines."

In total, about 60 students from the high school participate in the program each year, said Duane Kroseman, the high school's program manager. These students' career interests vary greatly, he added, but the majority of the students are able to find employers whose missions align with the students' interests.

Originally, the program was meant to act as a capstone for the students, said Kroseman, piecing together the knowledge the students learned throughout high school into a cumulative format.

But the students don't look at the program as being a capstone, he added. "They are looking for an experience right now. They're looking at it as being a 'let's-try-this-out-and-see-what-this-feels-like' class."

Most students leave the class having gained maturity, responsibility, and interpersonal skills, Kroseman said. "And a lot of them feel like they gain the

experience of seeing what a job situation really looks like, as opposed to sitting in a classroom, opening a book, and listening to a teacher talk."

He said he believes many students enter the class simply because they want to feel like they've grown up a bit. "Maybe just getting the chance to move away from the school," he proffered.

Some even say they learn what they don't want to do in the future, Kroseman said.

The program is very popular and successful with both students and employers, Kroseman added, with students getting class credit and real-life experience and employers getting some much-needed help.

"Most of my employers are repeat employers," said Kroseman. "In fact, the Corps of Engineers in particular has been

very useful to me in the last few years," he added, mentioning that the District has been participating in the program for more than 10 years.

"We're just thankful to have the no-cost help," said Wutzer. "And we're glad to see these students come in and get a chance to work in the field. I wish I had had the opportunity this young."

Wutzer said he hopes the Corps of Engineers makes an impression on Klunk, but moreover hopes Klunk takes the opportunity to find out what's best for him. "I hope it assists him in making the decision on what

would be the best career choice for him in the future, because it would be a shame for someone to think that maybe engineering is the right path for them, take it, go to school for four years, and then get out and say, wow, I wish I hadn't done this."

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**-John Wutzer,  
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